

# Per- and polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What are PFAS?

PFAS are a large group of man-made chemicals that have been used since the 1950s. Use of these chemicals has greatly decreased in the United States over the last 10 years. People can still be exposed to PFAS because they are still present in the environment. PFAS do not break down easily in the environment. They also build up and remain in the bodies of exposed humans and animals at levels measured in microgram per liter (ug/l) - this is equivalent to one drop of water diluted into 250 chemical drums. Over the last decade, interest in PFAS has grown.

### How can I be exposed to PFAS?

ATSDR and our state health partners are studying exposure to PFAS at a number of sites. PFAS are found near areas where they are manufactured or used. Listed below are places where they can be found.

- Public water systems and drinking water wells, soil, and outdoor air near industrial areas with frequent PFAS use
- Indoor air in spaces that contain carpets, textiles, and other consumer products treated with PFAS to resist stains
- Surface water (lakes, ponds, etc.) and run-off from areas where aqueous (water-based) film-forming fire fighting foam (AFFF) was often used (like military or civilian airfields)
- Locally caught fish from contaminated bodies of water
- Food items sold in the marketplace

Consumer products can be source of exposures to PFAS. These products include

- Some grease-resistant paper, fast food wrappers, microwave popcorn bags, pizza boxes, and candy wrappers
- Nonstick cookware such as Teflon® coated pots and pans
- Stain resistant coatings such as Scotchguard® used on carpets, upholstery, and other fabrics
- Water resistant clothing such as Gore-Tex®
- Cleaning products
- Personal care products (shampoo, dental floss) and cosmetics (nail polish, eye makeup)
- Paints, varnishes, and sealants

Recent efforts to stop using some PFAS in consumer products appear to have lowered exposure in the U.S. population. CDC surveys have shown that blood levels of PFAS have dropped over time. People who work with PFAS are more likely to be exposed than the general population. Workers may be exposed to PFAS by inhaling them, getting them on their skin, and swallowing them, but inhaling them is the most likely route for exposure.

### How can I reduce my exposure to PFAS?

PFAS are found in people and animals all over the world. They are found in some food products and in the environment (air, water, soil, etc.). Completely stopping exposure to PFAS is unlikely. But, if you live near sources of PFAS contamination you can take steps to reduce your risk of exposure to PFAS:

- Some states have warnings about eating fish from bodies of water with high PFAS levels. Check with your state public health and environmental quality departments to learn the types and local sources of fish that are safe to eat.
- If your water contains PFAS, you can reduce exposure by using an alternative or treated water source for drinking, food preparation, cooking, brushing teeth, and any activity that might result in ingestion of water.
- It is safe to shower and bathe in PFAS-contaminated water. Neither routine showering or bathing are a significant source of exposure. Studies have shown very limited absorption of PFAS through the skin.

## How can PFAS affect people's health?

Scientists are not sure about the health effects of human exposure to PFAS. Some studies in humans have shown that certain PFAS may affect the developing fetus and child, including possible changes in growth, learning, and behavior. In addition, they may decrease fertility and interfere with the body's natural hormones, increase cholesterol, affect the immune system, and even increase cancer risk.

- PFAS build up and stay in the human body and the amount goes down very slowly over time. So scientists and doctors are concerned about their effects on human health.
- Some studies show that animals given PFAS have changes in the liver, thyroid, pancreas, and hormone levels. Scientists are not sure what animal data means about human health. PFAS act differently in humans than they do in animals and may be harmful in different ways.

## How can I learn more?

Contact 1-800-CDC-INFO for updated information on this topic.

Contact the Consumer Product Safety Commission at (800) 638-2772 if you have questions about the products you use in your home.

**Visit the following websites for more information:**

### ATSDR Websites

<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfc/index.html>

### Environmental Protection Agency

<http://www2.epa.gov/chemical-research/perfluorinated-chemical-pfc-research>

## List of Common PFAS and Their Abbreviations

Compound	Abbreviation
Perfluorobutane sulfonate	PFBS
Perfluorohexane sulfonate	PFHxS
Perfluorooctane sulfonate	PFOS
Perfluoroheptanoic acid	PFHpA
Perfluorooctanoic acid	PFOA
Perfluorononanoic acid	PFNA
Perfluorodecanoic acid	PFDA
Perfluoroundecanoic acid	PFUnA
Perfluorododecanoic acid	PFDoA
Perfluorooctane sulfonamide	PFOSA
2-(N-Methyl-perfluorooctane sulfonamido) acetate	Me-PFOSA-AcOH
2-(N-Ethyl-perfluorooctane sulfonamido) acetate	Et-PFOSA-AcOH

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Use of trade names is for identification only and does not imply endorsement by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, the Public Health Service, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services